

2012 Parks Budget Community Conversations

Table 1 - Summary of Responses
Tuesday, May 3, 2011, Meadowbrook Community Center

Issue had to do with Parks' share of budget, compared to Public Safety and Human Services

Round #1:

Mike K. :Each of these budget items is important, but Parks is underfunded.

Rob: Don't do something short term that causes damage long term.

Julianne Ross-Upset about the last levy. We need maintenance at Magnuson Park. It's a historical District. The code can be softened. We should explore different strategies.

Jeremy Valenta: 9% sounds like a small number, it's a small amount of the budget. Tired of public safety taking it all, with only scraps to Parks. The staff should be creative and entrepreneurial.

Virginia: The Park District idea, that some other cities have, should be explored. It might have the same boundaries as the city, or it could have different boundaries than the city. Parks is always the first place cut. They need adequate funding a lot of people enjoy the parks and don't pay.

David Miller: Parks make Seattle, Seattle. They are part of what attracts bright people. Part of our competitive advantage. If we want density, we need a system to handle people. Our failure to maintain them causes trouble later—more expensive repairs. Should we have a metro park system? Develop impact fees. Gallagher pointed out that LA has a different system than we do. There should be bids on projects. We shouldn't see parks as a cost, but see them as a competitive advantage. Parks are the mark of a great city. He agrees that people don't pay for their enjoyment of parks, but they are enjoyed by low-income people. Others can get in their cars and go places. He takes his dog to Magnuson Park. He made a plea for Bldg. 11. He thinks it's tragic that Bldg. 11 is being forced out by developers.

Mike—seconds that.

Gloria Butts—Agrees that it's important to have good parks. Doesn't believe metro district will work. Public Safety is a mandate but of the \$95.000 Broadview is not getting it's share. "Gold leaf"? bldg. Is closed. Not pleased with the Directors. As a volunteer, shouldn't have been doing administrative work, that doesn't sit well with her. There is too much money in administrative end. There's a trickle down—bad things that are

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happening to the staff are abominable. Volunteers put in 1000s of hours. Wants recreation centers, environmental center to be open.

Round #2:

Deejah: We need parks as the cities get more crowded, but they don't have to be manicured, just maintained.

Phil Shack: It's apples and oranges. We need police AND parks. The tree canopy is being reduced. Libraries and parks get short shrift. We ought to be allowed by the State to raise more \$.

Deejah: We can better use volunteers.

Thatcher Bailery—He was struck by Manhattan parks. All sort of support—public/private. This is how we can be a great city. We should do a study on the value of parks. He believes \$500-600 million comes back to the city. It's not about what it costs us—there is measurable value back to the city.

Margaret Thonless—she is on boards, committees. She regards parks in the natural state as enormously important. Public safety is important—we must figure it out, do less manicuring, more care for natural areas.

Gregory: He has seen the East coast. We take police for granted. In the east—it's old, decrepit, industrial. We are green. Parks are important to us.

Ann Bostrom—Parks are important. We must focus on revenue. She's a professor. Parks doesn't have a good capital budget process.

Deejah: Canopy important. We all should pull ivy off of our current trees. She has tried to plan "Ivy outs", and has gotten no response from the parks dept.

Ann: We should think of health of parks as an entity—Chicago parks are part of the Chicago wilderness.

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Round #3:

Bonnie Miller: We ought to swap parks with human services (Parks @9%, human services @6%).

C. Sullivan: She has a question about human services. How many do the federal government serve? Does 6% serve fewer than all the people using the parks?

Bonnie Miller: parks shouldn't get more money than human services.

Bill: It's obvious that in order to sustain parks, the last few levys—we need funding mechanism designed to sustain. Shouldn't dismantle what has been built.

Several people: This question is unfair. There is not enough information to answer the question.

Ted: the crime rate has gone down, some police salaries may be high

Karen A. She doesn't know how the money is parceled out (this is along the lines of how the table's question is unfair).

Older woman next to Jean in a white sweater: The trail is maintained by a volunteer group. There's not enough of that going on.

Jeannie Hale: Volunteers can pull blackberries, ivy

Bill: There needs to be training for volunteer projects. Safety, tools. One person mentioned that it costs parks one man hour for each 4 volunteer hours—seems like a great return to him. There are 25 people on the trails working every Sunday—a great thing.

White Sweater: Doesn't parks keep track (volunteer hours)?

Bill: They have estimates

Bonnie Miller: the volunteers need support

Jeannie Hale: The parks should be the top priority, right after public safety.

White Sweater: Volunteers should be organized, should get better than ¼ ratio

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Bonnie Miller: Sail (at Magnuson) –no child goes without a lesson who wants one, teachers are volunteers.

Round #4:

Linnea Mattson—She is with Lifelong Recreation. She doesn't want to see a shrinking pie—didn't the public vote to fund parks?

Jean: yes, acquisition, not maintenance.

David Mattson—likes the way parks are kept, but the projected shortfall (on maintenance?) is huge. He wants to see more money go to parks, but the potholes need to be fixed.

Linnea—Parks are more important during the economic downturn. Carkeek is always packed. Lifelong recreation is for people on a fixed budget. Parks needs more revenue. More are participating in affordable exercise/recreation. She doesn't want a cut. Teens involved in parks aren't misbehaving. Seniors are more healthy, not a drain on social services. These are compelling reasons to adequately fund parks.

Chris Leman: the physical parts—structures, trails, are damaged by neglect. The highest priority is stewardship. Neglect can be dangerous. The programs are important, such as the community center hours—but it is inexcusable to neglect maintenance. For example, the pier downtown will be too expensive to repair. Roofs, invasive weeds—get maintenance back on a regular schedule.

Marilyn—Japanese knotweed on the Burke Gilman Trail. She doesn't want the park commercialized. Advisory—Magnuson Park—they are talking about the leases. Are their foundations, reasonable commercial uses that will keep the public benefit? The Public should afford it, stay in control.

Green Sweater: We can get revenue from book sales, maintain buildings, there should be more taxes.

Dan: He is from Colorado. He is sad to see the lack of maintenance (\$) our parks are fabulous.

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Owen: concerned about Bldg. 11 going to LLC to generate rent and push out arts and sailing. There must be a combination—maintenance, bldg. Use, ad revenue. A 40 year lease and entire us is wrong.

Round #5:

Mike: There are enormous inefficiencies in the fire dept. National association of Chiefs were not asked to do a study. (1970 the last study?) It shouldn't be, who gets the last deck chair on a sinking ship. It used to be 68% of economic activity—but now it's only 40% of economic activity that is taxable.

Doug Bostrom—wife is at the UW—we need to be brave about revenue. Inefficiencies—not bottomless. We have hit bone. Parks can't assign bottom line figures, they are working on guesses.

Donna: She is curious about inefficiencies in Parks. Need to know numbers. How much does it cost to maintain HER park, for example?

Carol: this is happening because that's how they've always done it. Must think of new ways to bring in money. Not privatization. Efficiencies of staff. She is on the Community Center Advisory team. There is more data on other jurisdictions than our own. They did a good job last year in the budget process, good decisions on cuts, but they've got to show people something (better planning for the future).

Mike: we have the most expensive parks dept. other than DC, and we don't know why. We don't have expensive monuments—is it our small parks? We need answers.

Doug Bostrom: Take the problem to the Dan Evans school.

Mike: It's a master's thesis

Donna/Carol: Don't believe the 1—4 ratio (volunteer hours to paid staff hours)

Doug/Mike: that's not bad

Donna: some cities have a 1—8 hour ratio

Doug: it's still a good deal

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Carol: parks can decrease human services, safety expenses if they do it right. Creative, healthful, productive environment, seniors can stay active in their own homes, kids are off the streets. They are most important—seniors and kids.

Donna: every \$ in parks—in the long run, saves \$4 in public safety

Ruth Williams: People live here because of the setting—the parks. They should be prioritized.

Donna: Parks touch everybody.

Mike: parks are subsidized 2/3rds, Fire 100%. Parks recovers 34%--(through fees) that's high

Carol: She wanted an economic impact study. Was told it was done, but it wasn't for services

Donna: What we offered was not what was needed.

Carol: her son might be willing to do the study, it's his field, he is retired. What kind of positive impact does parks have?

Ruth: Voluntary taxes, (library cards?) not fees, but voluntary.